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Swardspeak as a Communication Medium Among University Students: Empirical Evidence from the Philippines

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Abstract

This descriptive study identified the profile, common swardspeak and frequency of its use, and the situations of usage among the Bachelor of Secondary Education students in a higher education institution in the Philippines during the academic year 2020-2021. Thirty (30) randomly selected respondents supplied the data through a survey questionnaire, which was analyzed using frequency count and percentage. Results showed that most of the students who use swardspeak are female within the age range of 19-22 years old. The most common swardspeak used are afam, akeno/aketch/akis, awra, baboosh, beks/vaklangtow, bonak/junakis, bongga, borlog, chaka/shonget, char/charot/chos, cheka/chika, chosera/chusera, churva, daks, dites/ditey, eclavu, eme/keme, ganern, gora/gorabels, gurl, Hagardo Versoza, hanash, imas, juntis/juntils, juts, kabog, kalerki/nakakalurky, keribels/keriboomboom/keri lang, kiber, knowangji, krayola, lafang, Lotlot/Lotlot De Leon, mamsh/momshee/mudra/mudrakels, murayta, pagoda, pakak, payola, pudra, shala, sinetch/sinetchitey, sizt, shokot, shonga/shunga, shupatid, spyokang, Tom Jones, waley/wis/wit/wiz, warla, and Winwin Marquez. Most of these swardspeak words are sometimes used in public places with friends, and in instances or situations where they have to go with or join a group. These cross-sectional findings can affect further studies as this swardspeak can be enhanced as this generation goes out and come up with sets of new words.

Keywords: swardspeak, frequency, education students, communication, locations, instances

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1. Introduction

Language is one of the fundamental tools in shaping a society. One of the most important aspects of language is to establish communication and social relations. In sociolinguistics, a certain society may compose speech varieties that may classify social groups. These varieties come up as casual conversation mediums or an identifiable symbol understood by the members of their groups. Swardspeak, as a form of sociolect, is a speech variety being used by the homosexual community as the leading flagship of their culture and identity (Kastrati, 2017); sounds witty and twangy, and it immediately identifies the speaker as homosexual (Shadel, 2016). In the words of Boudieu (1991), "it is not space which defines language but language which defines its space." He added that swardspeak has indeed created a distinct space for gay communities in the Philippines, helping them resist cultural assimilation.

According to Suguitan (2005), a lot has happened since the gay community in the Philippines felt the need to fight against a homophobic culture. He said that the use of gay lingo in print, film, television, and radio came about the acceptance of this formerly marginalized sector. In fact, many non-gays from different walks of life can now speak or at least understand gay lingo. What formerly served as a marginalized sector's way of alienating the people that shunned it is fast becoming the means through which the same sector is being readmitted into mainstream society (Suguitan, 2005). It can be observed that even heterosexual people are also using the language. Young individuals especially college students, regardless of their age and gender, are likely motivated to incorporate swardspeak in their casual conversations (Papua et al., 2021a). It is still unclear what the specific swardspeak is being spoken by this group of users, and how often they use it in a given social phenomenon.

Noticeably, such language is often heard among Generation Z. The language sounds weird to some and foreign to most but is starting to become popular in this era. Hence, the relevance of this study is in focus as it looked into the common swardspeak and the frequency of its use, as well as the instances of its use among the Bachelor of Secondary Education in a higher education institution in Western Visayas considering them becoming teachers. Specifically, it described the swardspeak they commonly and frequently use, where and with whom they use the said language and the reasons for using swardspeak.

2. Literature review

2.1. Nature and characteristics of swardspeak

Swardspeak, also known as the gay lingo of Philippine culture, is becoming prevalent as a spoken language. Aside from these two, it comes in so many other names – gayspeak, baklese, bekimon, and beki language (Nuncio et al., 2021). Its written form has not been established primarily because of its nature – its dynamism, being relatively new, and being an argot, a secret medium to communicate (Catacutan, 2015). Gay lingo is an adaptation of the mainstream languages in the Philippines, such as Hiligaynon-Visayan, English, Filipino, and other languages in the country. It progressed from being anti-language developed by marginalized communities as a secret language to protect them from discrimination. The construct of the Hiligaynon-Visayan lexicon is characterized by affixation, use of popular names, nativization of loan words, connotation through images, and the use of loan words with corrupted denotation. Just like any other gay language, this is entertaining, funny, witty and colorful (Cortogo et al., 2021). Cantina (2020) observed that gays construct their language through simple reversal, simple reversal with affixation, substitution, letter insertion, clipping, clipping with affixation, clipping with repetition, straight word with affixation, stylized reversal with affixation, proper names and common names, sound association, image association, metathesis, and camp names. The gay argot serves as their shield from the disapproving patriarchal society, feminization technique, humorous effect, metaphorical way, and secretive in-group communication. Moreover, gay words are informal, non-standard, impolite, and some are taboo. The social experiences of the gay language speakers define the creativity and depth of their construction. The wider their social experience, the more unique and complex their utterances may become (Silvano, 2018).

Recent studies across the world suggested varied terms on swardspeak. In the United States, swardspeak is popularly termed gay speak or queerspeak. The term and the identification of its material paved the way for the existence of lavender linguistics (Friess, 2014). In England, there is also the same form of language called polari. It functioned as a secret language by homosexual men from outsiders and undercover police during the 1940s, because same-sex relationships were legally prohibited at that time. Polari was then passed down through verbal communication, resulting in different versions (Baker, 2010). Similarly, South Africa has a variety of swardspeak called gayle. It also served as a secret language before when homosexuality was also illegal in their country (Luyt, 2014). In Indonesia, gays

2.2. Morphology and purpose of swardspeak

Various studies found that users of swardspeak follow a morphological process or strategy in forming the language. For instance, they derive or create words through metathesis, affixation, substitution, duplication, borrowing, acronym, clipping/reduction, blending, and using of onomatopoeia and the name of a popular person or place (Amante, 2021; Cantina, 2020; Lunzaga et al., 2011; Oficiar, 2019; Pascual, 2016). Moreover, Romero (2019) conducted an observational study wherein she identified confessed gay students as her major participants. The result suggested that the common swardspeak they used were a backstreet boy (handsome man), chaka (ugly), char/charing/charot (joke/just kidding), emote (to cry/to be sad), itich (it/this), jutay or juts (small), kever ko (I don't care!), rampa/rampage (to walk with glamour), and Washington/wis (none/no). Likewise, in a study conducted by Cabelita and Gacrama (2020), some common swardspeak that they collected from their gay participants are aida (AIDS), ava (crazy), baboosh (goodbye/bye), balur (house), borlog (to sleep), chaka (ugly), char/charot (joke/just kidding), crayola (to cry), daks (big), gora/gorabels (to go), Hagardo Versoza (haggard), inlababo (in love), jalousie (to get jealous), JudyAnnSantos (no), jumas (fare), juspital (hospital), knowing (to know), korekong (correct), Lani Misalucha (rain), latina (girl/woman), Matet de Leon (to steal), shubtik (hurry), shunga (dumb), Tom Jones (hungry), and Winwin Marquez (to win/winner). However, terms from swardspeak are dynamic and widely diverse to the extent that it is now difficult to establish a concrete dictionary of the language (Cantina, 2020). Rubiales (2020) asserted that users of swardspeak would continue to develop new terminologies to sustain the language.

Prevailing factors that may contribute to its existence are the influences of online and television segments that incorporate swardspeak, constant exposure to a homosexual friend, and the sense of self-fulfillment of the users to follow the trend (Romero, 2019). It is still, however, unclear what are the specific swardspeak being spoken by this group of users, and how often they use it in a given social phenomenon.

According to Nuncio et al. (2021), this language is no longer exclusive to gay men. It is not uncommon for women and heterosexual men to use words such as kaloka, keri, charot, bongga, tsika, churva, chever, jowa, feelingero/a, and harot in ordinary conversation. One can no longer question a man's sexuality simply because he uses such words with gusto. Gay language can also be heard in formal settings—inside the classroom, during a meeting, and even during the homily of a Catholic mass. The Internet, likewise, provides a dynamic space for sharing definitions of popular Filipino gay words. These are some of the many ways in which gay language has become popular.

Homosexuals most especially gays use swardspeak to be unique from other social groups, be their identity, give them pleasure, and be accepted in a certain group (Pascual, 2016). Other reasons why homosexuals use swardspeak are to express feelings, cover up sensual topics, hide secrets, use it for gossip, resist the dominant culture of their area, create space on their own, and prevent other people from interfering in their discourse (Amante, 2021; Romero, 2019; Rosales & Careterro, 2019). They do so to maintain the secrecy of their sexually-related conversations, to set the parameters of the in-group against the out-group, and to show off their facility by using remarkable language (Demetrio et al., 2021). Additionally, Romero (2019) pointed out that speakers use the language everywhere, in social gatherings, public places, and meeting places. In most parts of the world, the third sex community may still get unfavorable acceptance due to religious and cultural factors. They are sometimes the subject of discrimination specifically in terms of their physical appearance, action, and dressing up (Nadal & Corpus, 2012; Pascual, 2016; Papua et al., 2021). For this reason, swardspeak also functions as a defense mechanism against a homophobic society (Catacutan, 2015).

Further, in a study conducted by Cortez (2017) in which most of the respondents are female and relatively under the young adult bracket, results indicated that gay language could be accepted and used by general people. Swardspeak should, however, be carefully reviewed before being spoken to avoid offense or misunderstanding to the receivers of the message. Racoma (2013) stated that swardspeak must be used with caution. More so, (Papua et al.,2021) affirmed that most youth nowadays are using gay language as a form of communication. Among their respondents, 64% are female and have the age bracket of 13 to 21. Results showed that females are more frequent using swardspeak, compared to men, and that they began to learn the language around the age of thirteen.

In a study by Papua et al. (2021), they found that majority of the millennials use gay lingo for communication. They established that as the age of the millennials increases the source of information about gay lingo decreases. They also found that females tend to have gay friends as compared to males, and females are more open about homosexuality as compared to males. Romero (2019) concludes that gay lingos function as a cover-up and a tool to keep up with modern trends, a representation of a sub-culture, and a reflection of the environment of a person. These are used socially and for interaction. These also reflect their self-identity, present their experience, impart factual information, and control the behavior of others. Likewise, these word substitutes are used in circumstances that require them to replace vulgar words so as not to hurt the feelings of others, and where taboo issues such as sexual misdemeanor confront them to isolate themselves.

2.3. Theoretical framework

This study was anchored on the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) advocated by Albert Bandura in 1986 which suggests that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction of the person, environment, and behavior (reciprocal determinism). It explains how people regulate their behavior to achieve their goals (LaMorte, 2019). Swardspeak is believed to be a product of the interaction between the persons (in this case, the student participants), the people and the culture around them, and their reaction to these factors. The environment where technology drives the system of life along with the people involved in it may affect the development of the communication skills as well as the genre of information of the students. How the culture surrounding this young generation may bring about their language medium is of great interest to this research undertaking.

Another theoretical reference of this study is the Queer Theory of De Lauretis who explained that there are at least three interrelated aspects in human sexuality: refusing heterosexuality as the benchmark for sexual formations, a challenge to the belief that lesbian and gay studies is one single entity, and a strong focus on the multiple ways that race sexual bias (Illinois Library, 2022). Queer Theory is a redefined term used for the studies of noncompliance of anything with the set standards, norms, perceived and believed ways of doing things. "Queer" is a behavior that is not in line with the social and political norms of society and government and includes the population of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

3. Methodology

The descriptive research design was used in this study as it aims to accurately and systematically describe the characteristics of a population, situation, or phenomenon. It could answer questions such as what is or what was (Bickman & Rog, 1998). Thus, the common swardspeak they use, the frequency, the location, the people with whom they and the instances or situations when they use swardspeak were established by this design.

Thirty (30) students officially enrolled in the program, Bachelor of Secondary Education in a higher education institution in Western Visayas during the Academic Year 2020-2021 were chosen through a random sampling method.

Table 1 presents the personal profile of the respondents in terms of age and gender. Among the 30 respondents, 9 or 30% are of the age 19 and 20 years old, 10 or 33% are 21 years old, and 2 or 7% are 22 years old. This means that the student respondents belong to the Generation Z (Gen Z) group. According to Parker and Igielnik (2020), Gen Z is the name given to the current generation of young people by many demographic researchers. It consists of people born between 1997 to 2012, and more than half of those ages 18 to 21 years old were enrolled in either a two- or four-year college (Warren, 2022).

Table 1Demographic Characteristics

Profile	Frequency	Percent
	Age	
19	9	30.0
20	9	30.0
21	10	33.0
22	2	7.0
Mean Age: 20.17 years old		
	Gender	
Male	5	17.0
Female	18	60.0
LGBTQ+	7	23.0
Total:	30	100.0

The same table shows the gender classification of the respondents. Data revealed that of the 30 respondents, 5 or 17% are male, 18 or 60% are female, and 7 or 23% are members of the LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer plus). These demographic characteristics are consistent with Cortez (2017) where most of the individuals who use swardspeak are female and relatively under the young adult bracket. These also confirmed the

observations of Papua et al. (2021) where they affirmed that females are more frequent in using swardspeak compared to males and that they began to learn the language around the age of 13.

A researcher-made survey questionnaire validated by experts was utilized to collect data. This was set using the Google form and sent through the use of Gmail and Messenger considering the health situations during the pandemic. The survey questionnaire was composed of three (3) parts. Part One (1) was to identify the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of age and gender. Part Two (2) was to establish the comprehensive list of the common swardspeak used by the respondents. And, Part Three (3) was composed of multiple-item questions with several choices as to the frequency of use and situations where these are used.

The data collected from the respondents were tallied and analyzed using frequency count, percentage, and rank. This calculation was expressed by both the absolute or actual count and the relative totals of percentage. The data were then presented in tables with descriptions and implications.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 2 enumerates the common swardspeak frequently used by the student respondents.

Table 2

Common Swardspeak Frequently Used by the Respondents

Swardspeak	English Translation	Rank
char/charot/chos	joke/just kidding	1.0
waley/wis/wit/wiz	no/none	2.5
chaka/shonget	ugly	2.5
shala	impressive	4.3
akeno/aketch/akis	I/me	4.3
bonak/junakis	child/kid	4.3
mamsh/momshee/ mudra/mudrakels	mother	7.5
keribels/keriboomboom/ kerilang	to carry	7.5
kalerki/nakakalurky	to get crazy	9.5
gora/gorabels	to go	9.5

Char/charot/chos (joke or just kidding) were the most frequently used swardspeak among the respondents. Waley/wis/wit/wiz (no/none) and chaka/shonget (ugly) came out as

second-ranked, while shala (impressive), akeno/aketch/akis (I/me), and bonak/junakis (child/kid) were ranked third. The other popular swardspeak that made it to the top ten were identified by the student respondents as mamsh/momshee/mudra/mudrakels (mother), keribels/keriboomboom/kerilang (to carry), kalerki/nakakalurky (to get crazy), and gora/gorabels (to go).

Other swardspeak mentioned by respondents included nouns like pudra (father), beks/vaklangtow (gay), afam (foreigner), gurl (girl), sizt (sister), shupatid (sibling), hanash (complaint/issue), payola (payment), and baboosh (goodbye). There were also swardspeak used as adjectives that were identified such as bongga (amazing), eme/keme (not true), chosera (liar), Hagardo Verzosa (haggard), shunga (dumb), Tom Jones (hungry), daks (big), juts (small), kabog (stunning), juntis/juntils (pregnant), murayta (cheap), pagoda (tired), shokot (afraid), and Winwin Marquez (winner). Some swardspeak cited acting as infinitives were awra (to get one's attention), borlog (sleep), Lotlot/Lotlot De Leon (to lose), cheka/chika (to gossip), nowanji (to know), krayola (to cry), lafang (to eat), spyok/spyukang (to speak), and warla (to fight). Simple statements had their swardspeak equivalent as stated: sinetch/sinetchetiy (Who?/Who is it?), eclavu (My love!), ganern (That's it.), and kiber (I don't care).

Noticeably, some of the swardspeak enumerated by the respondents have been mentioned in the study of Romero in 2019, and Cabelita and Gacrama in 2020. These were chaka (ugly), char/charing/charot (joke/just kidding), itich (it/this), jutay or juts (small), kever (I don't care!), Washington/wis(none/no), baboosh (goodbye/bye), borlog (to sleep), chaka (ugly), crayola (to cry), daks (big), gora/gorabels (to go), Hagardo Versoza (haggard), knowing (to know), shunga (dumb), Tom Jones (hungry), and Winwin Marquez (to win/winner).

Data in Table 3 show that 17 or 57% of the respondents use swardspeak sometimes. Nine or 30% seldom use it, and only 4 or 13% use the language always. This result implies that despite its popularity in the social community, swardspeak does not replace the usual conversational medium used by Gen Z. This result is not congruent with the conclusion made by Papua et al. (2021) who affirmed in a study that most of the youth nowadays, especially college students, regardless of their age and gender, are likely motivated to incorporate swardspeak in their casual conversations.

Table 3Frequency of Swardspeak Use

Indicator	Frequency	Percent
Always	4	13.0
Sometimes	17	57.0
Seldom	9	30.0
Total:	30	100

Table 4 establishes the location where, and the people with whom the respondents use swardspeak. Out of the 30 student-respondents, 30 use swardspeak in public places with friends, followed by 28 in school with classmates, and 18 at home with siblings. It was observed that 24 of the respondents said that they also use swardspeak when talking with their schoolmates in school but rarely with teachers. They seldom use swardspeak with their parents at home, and with strangers in public places. This implies that Gen Z is particular as to where and with whom they should be using this kind of language. This result is contradictory with the findings of Romero (2019) who pointed out that speakers of swardspeak use the language everywhere, in social gatherings, public places, and meeting places.

 Table 4

 Locations and With Whom Swardspeak is Used

Indicators	Frequency	Rank
At home with -		
a. parents/guardians	7	2
b. siblings	18	1
At school with -		
a. classmates	28	1
b. schoolmates	24	2
c. teachers	7	3
In public places with -		
a. friends	30	1
b. strangers	2	2

Table 5 reveals the instances or situations when the respondents use swardspeak. Based on the data shown, going with or joining the group was the foremost reason why student-respondents use swardspeak. A big number of the respondents said that swardspeak is used by them to hide or cover up their secrets and/or confidential information. Some use language to express their emotions while only a few use it to assert their opinions. These results imply

that swardspeak is sort of a ticket to be accepted in a social group, and serves as a code for members of a group to convey a message that only they can understand.

Table 5 *Instances or Situations When Swardspeak is Used*

Indicator	Frequency	Rank
To go with/join a group	22	1
To hide/cover-up secrets/confidential information	18	2
To express emotions (angry, happy, sad, inspired, etc.)	17	3
To assert opinion/views	12	4

As Pascual (2016) puts it, gays use swardspeak to be unique from other groups, be their identity, give them pleasure, and be accepted in a certain group. Other reasons why homosexuals use swardspeak are to express feelings, cover up sensual topics, hide secrets, use for gossip, resist the dominant culture of their area, create space on their own, and prevent other people to interfere in their discourse (Amante, 2021; Romero, 2019; Rosales & Careterro, 2019). It also served as a secret language before when homosexuality was also illegal in the country (Luyt, 2014). Catacutan (2015) stated that swardspeak also functions as a defense mechanism against a homophobic society.

5. Conclusion

This study focused on establishing the common swardspeak frequently used by the selected Bachelor of Secondary Education students in a Western Visayas higher education institution. It also described where and with whom they use, and the reasons for using said swardspeak. Results showed that they use swardspeak in communicating particularly with peers, classmates, and schoolmates their age, most often in public places and in school but seldom at home, yet emphasized that this is done only sometimes, to be with or accepted by the group, to hide or coverup secrets, and express emotions. Most swardspeak mentioned were common.

With these findings, it can be deduced then that swardspeak is used as a means of communication by anyone regardless of their age and gender preferences. It is used but not limited to some places and instances with specific considerations and restrictions aligned to the culture, values, and norms set in a particular society. In the same way, the use of swardspeak may be embedded in the discussions in schools as this will enrich and sustain the

characteristics of this language genre and give awareness to students about the culture and identity of certain groups in society. In addition, words in swardspeak are changing and speakers keep on creating and innovating terminologies that may modify the meaning and the intentions of the speakers and users.

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